DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 230 511 SP 022 314

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TITLE Entry-Year Assistance Committee: A Support System for Beginning Teachers.
PUB DATE May 83
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators (Orlando, FL, January 30-February 2, 1983).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Role; *Beginning Teachers; *Helping Relationship; Higher Education; *Peer Counseling; *Peer Evaluation; *Probationary Period; Role Conflict; Staff Development; *Teacher Certification; Teacher Education; Teacher Evaluation

ABSTRACT

Recent legislation in Oklahoma stipulates that upon graduation a teacher is issued a license instead of a certificate which only may be obtained after successful completion of the first year of teaching. An Entry-year Assistance Committee is assigned to each new teacher. This Committee, composed of a representative of higher education, the building principal, and an experienced teacher, is responsible for assisting, guiding, observing, and evaluating the beginning teacher. While the Committee may recommend granting or withholding a certificate at the end of the first year, its primary function is one of support and helpfulness. Periodic meetings and observations occur throughout the year and the beginning teacher remains in close contact with Committee members and is kept fully informed of evaluation comments. The teacher may call upon any member of the Committee for assistance. Some areas of concern projected for this newly-instituted program are: funding, legal implications of the Committee refusing certification, and possible role conflict on the part of the school principal. Details of committee functions are described and evaluation instruments are appended. (JD)

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ENTRY-YEAR ASSISTANCE COMMITTEE:

A SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR BEGINNING TEACHERS

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INTRODUCTION

The 1980 Oklahoma Legislature passed a comprehensive piece of legislation dealing with teacher education programs, certification and staff development. This legislation, the result of a year's work by an interim legislative committee, held public hearings and received input from various pressure groups and identifiable populations. This legislation, labeled HB1706, identifies four concerns and recommendations for addressing weaknesses in these areas of concern.

The first concern is the lack of screening requirements for admission to professional teacher education. This area is being strengthened by mandating competency in oral and written communications. The Professional Standards Board, an advisory board to the State Department of Education, is establishing a state-wide minimum cumulative grade point average as an admission requirement to professional teacher education. Admission criteria also includes a pre-student teaching requirement of experiences with children and/or students in school or related situations.

Curriculum exams are also required by HB1706. Prospective students must successfully pass State Department of Education developed examinations over the

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subject areas identified in certification standards. All candidates must pass the examination for a particular subject area in order to be licensed in that area.

Another area delineated by HB1706 is the area of staff development. All public school teachers are required, under guidelines developed by a local staff development committee, to continue their education beyond their initial licensing. Higher education faculty who teach methods courses, supervise student teachers, or serve on Entry-year Assistance Committees must also undergo an institutionally developed form of faculty development. This faculty development includes required service in the public schools.

The greatest change brought about by the passage of HB1706 is that upon graduation the teacher is issued a license instead of a certificate. This license is generally usable for one year, with a possible second-year use available. The obtaining of a certificate comparable to those held by other teachers in Oklahoma is the responsibility of a team of experienced professionals who guide the teacher through his/her first year of employment as a teacher. This group of professionals is known as an Entry-year Assistance Committee.

THE ENTRY-YEAR ASSISTANCE COMMITTEE

The Entry-year Assistance Committee is designed to meld higher education faculty and public schools staff into a single unit to provide the necessary support, guidance, and constructive criticism to aid the first-year teacher. This committee, composed of a representative of higher education, the building principal or an administrator selected by the school board and an experienced teacher who teaches in the building are identified as being the Entry-year Assistance Committee. The higher education representative is requested of the institution which granted the entry-year teacher his/her license. It is the responsibility of the granting institution to assign a faculty member or to request a closer institution to send a representative for the Entry-year Assistance Committee. In the event of an out-of-state teacher, the school system contacts the closest higher education institution. The teacher consultant, who is selected by the building principal, is often the key to a successful entry-year program. He/She must hold a standard certificate and have at least two years of classroom teaching experience as a certificated teacher. The teacher consultant is required to work with the

entry-year teacher a minimum of one hundred twenty days and spend a minimum of seventy-two hours in observation and/or consultation with the entry year teacher. The teacher consultant receives an additional five hundred dollars a year above his/her regular place on the salary schedule. The administrator has the task of initiating contact with the higher education faculty member and coordinating the scheduling of the first committee meeting. This comittee, with at least one member having expertise in the certification area of the entry-year teacher, must separate its role of recommending certification from its much larger role of providing assistance for the beginning teacher. This asistance is based upon the premise that the first year of any new profession is usually the most difficult. Most successful teachers can recall a friendly co-worker who provided inspirational assistance by offering advice, giving counsel, lending a sympathetic ear and offering possible solutions to seemingly complex problems. The Entry-year Assistance Committee attempts to legitimize this procedure by offering people of whom the first-year teacher may request assistance.

THE PROCESS

The assistance process consists of a minimum of six

visits with three of these visits being meetings of the Entry-year Assistance Committe and three being independent observations by each member of the Entry-year Assistance Committee. The recommended time frame for each of these six activities is listed in Appendix A. Committee Meeting I, which includes the entry-year teacher, is the initial meeting where the basic rules and functions are outlined. As with most committees, the first business is the election of a chairman. This chairman, who is most often the administrator, is responsible for establishing a communication system and a schedule that fits the requirements of the legislation as well as the requirements of individual buildings and/or school systems. Knowledge of the particular demands of a building, the proximity to the teacher consultant and entry-year teacher, as well as the availablity by telephone tend to make the administrator the logical choice as chairman. The state-mandated evaluation instrument (Appendix B) is discussed and two copies of this four-page NCR form are distributed to each committee member. The evaluation instrument, which offers suggested areas of potential assistance, is discussed with the entry-year teacher in order to identify some of the more important aspects of teaching. A procedure is developed whereby the Entry-year

Assistance Committee defines a process to obtain "meaningful parental input". This input is required by the legislation. Observation I and Observation II are independently arranged by each committee member. These observations of classroom instruction must be arranged at a time that provides maximum opportunity for the entry-year teacher to fully demonstrate his/her capabilities and abilities. This prearranged time for observation is essential to prevent an unnecessary trip when adequate observation is prohibitive. The entry-year teacher actions observed in the first two observations are combined and written on one set of the evaluation instruments. If there is sufficient concern after one observation, a special meeting of the Entry-year Assistance Committee may be requested by any committee member.

Committee Meeting II, which should occur between the 70th and 100th day of employment, is designed to review progress and formulate recommendations concerning performance of the entry-year teacher. Each page of the form is discussed by the committee member who completes that page and an opportunity is provided for the entry-year teacher to verbally respond. The chairman and the entry-year teacher sign a form (Appendix C) and the entry-year teacher has the opportunity to write appropriate comments.

Observation III, which is usually arranged at Committee Meeting II, should be between the 100th and the 150th day of employment. Like the other observation, this observation is independently arranged and accomplished. The results of the observed teacher's actions are recorded on the other set of evaluation instruments. These completed evaluation instruments are taken to the final formal meeting of the Entry-year Assistance Committee.

Committee Meeting III cannot occur before April 10 of a school year. This date prohibits the recommendations of the Entry-year Assistance Committee from being used as a re-employment recommendation. This misuse is possible because Oklahoma teachers are employed under a continuing contract which makes notification by March 15 necessary if the teacher is not to be employed for the ensuing year. This keeps the function of the committee one of assistance rather than allowing it to be a personnel tool of the school system. The basic procedures of Committee Meeting III are identical to those used in Committee Meeting II. Following the review of the evaluation instruments, the entry-year teacher is given all copies of the evaluation instruments. This means the entry-year teacher receives the other copy of the results of Observation I and II, and both copies of the comments regarding Observation

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III. This requirement assures that the function of these instruments remains one of assisting the entry-year teacher rather than possibly being used to the future detriment of the entry-year teacher. The Entry-year Assistance Committee must, by majority vote, recommend the entry-year teacher for certification or another year with a license and an Entry-year Assistance Committee. If the Committee recommends another year the entry-year teacher may request a different committee. The Committee also must recommend staff development activities for the entry-year teacher. These proposed activities are based upon the observations and are designed to assist the teacher as he/she enters his/her second year as a teacher.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCERNS

The implications and concerns are somewhat hypothetical since the Entry-year Assistance Committee Program was implemented with the beginning of the 1983-84 school year. The problems associated with the higher education faculty are varied. The primary problem concerns the financing of this program. Student credit hour production is the financial backbone of higher education funding in Oklahoma. This program produces no credit hours yet it obligates time and

resources for travel, communication and administration. This situation results in institutions receiving direct financial reimbursement via a contract between the governing board of all public higher education in Oklahoma, the State Regents for Higher Education, and the State Department of Education, who must develop rules and regulations to fulfill the intent of HB1706. Such a relationship produces another layer of bureauracy which is insensitive to the individual needs based upon such variable factors as geography, population density, numbers of available faculty, expertise areas of faculty and existing teaching loads. The increasing amount of bureaucratic paperwork generated by the Entry-year Assistance Committee structure can be overwhelming. Various levels require specialized reports such as planning budgets, number of committee meetings, number of observations and related data. The monthly submission of these reports can become complicated when the Entry-year Assistance Committee must function during two fiscal years to ensure the required one hundred twenty days of minimum service.

An untested area of concern deals with the legal relationship of the committee and the entry-year teacher. Most professional liability insurance policies limit the protection to incidents where the policy holder is in a superordinate position. This is in

contrast to the role of the committee members who are colleagues and whose primary function is to aid and assist the entry-year teacher. Only litigation over requiring a second entry-year, or denying certification after a second entry-year, will clealy distinguish between the role of assistance versus the role of recommending certification.

A primary concern of the higher education faculty is his/her role involving a teacher employed by a school district. The entry-year teacher has undergone screening processes and has been determined to be the best available for a particular position. Some administrators may view this process as inviting someone to view the results of your best efforts and encouraging them to find error in your judgements. The challenge lies in getting higher education faculty to seize the opportunity to lessen the gulf between higher education and the public schools without destroying opportunity to assist the first-year teacher.

The teacher consultant is required to log the seventy-two hours that is spent with the entry-year teacher. Despite several attempts to legislatively require released time for the teacher consultant to work with the entry-year teacher, the present plan is to utilize time before and after school sessions, lunch periods and any other available time. This often

interrupts the necessary preparation and/or evaluation time. Thus the background work for effective teaching may be slighted. In smaller secondary and selected elementary schools the certificate area of the teacher consultant may not be the same as that of the entry-year teacher. Unless the teacher consultant has a variety of related experiences, he/she may be unable to assist the entry-year teacher with subject related problems. This is especially prevalent in subjects that are not part of the graduation requirements in secondary schools.

The administrator may often suffer a role conflict. All non-tenured public school teachers in Oklahoma must be evaluated twice yearly. One function of this evaluation, which is usually done by the building principal, is to make a recommendation regarding employment for the following year. This role conflict is intensified by the fact that a principal may elect to use the same observation period for both entry-year and employment recommendations. This also causes the entry-year teacher to be reluctant to admit needing help because he/she is unsure whether the administrator is in a supervisory role or the role of a colleague.

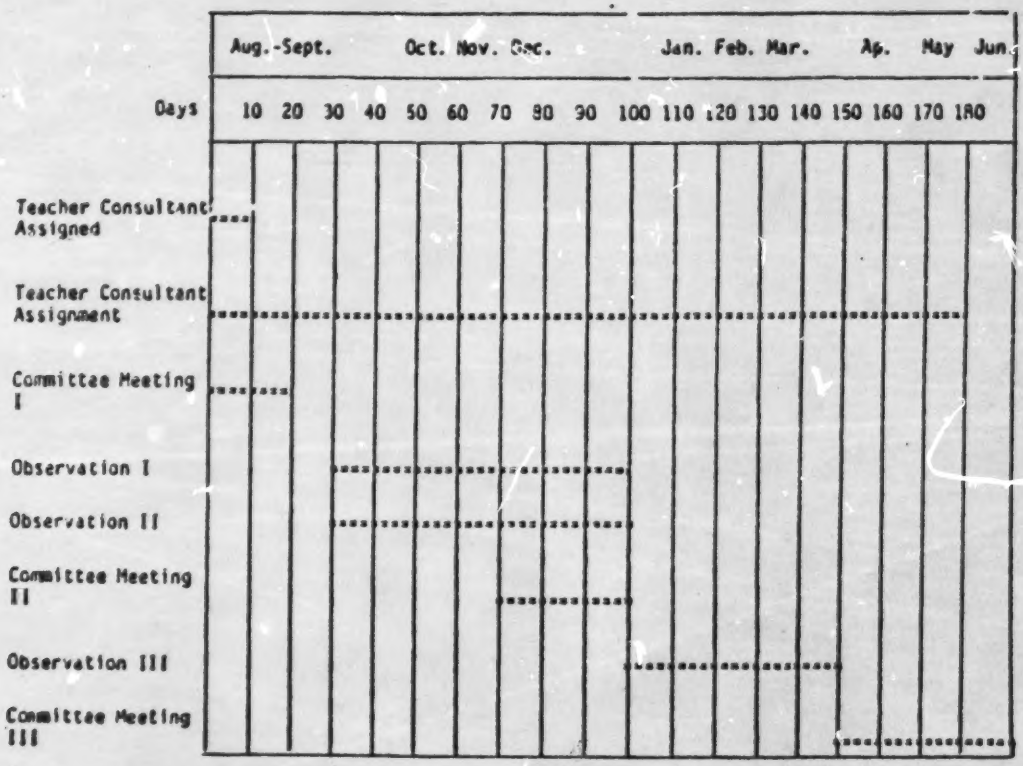
In summation, it appears the Entry-year Assistance Committee has the necessary structure to become a viable part of a support system for first-year teachers in Oklahoma. Like all programs, the success of the

Entry-year Assistance Committee will be directly proportional to the attitude used in its implementation. Should the goal become to complete the paperwork in a manner that is impressive, the public schools and ultimately the children in these public schools, will suffer. The opportunity to develop as effective assistance program is evident. Only the future implementation of the Entry-year Aasistance Committee will determine its success or failure.

APPENDIX A

GUIDE FOR ENTRY-YEAR COMMITTEE

FOR ENTRY-YEAR TEACHERS
STARTING EMPLOYMENT AT START OF SCHOOL YEAR



APPENDIX B

I. Human Relations

A. Reacts with sensitivity to the needs and feelings of others.
B. Helps students build self-awareness and a positive self-concept.
C. Provides positive reinforcement to students.
D. Interacts and communicates effectively with parents and staff.
E. Treats students firmly and fairly while maintaining respect for their worth as individuals.
F. Develops and maintains rapport with students.
G. Helps students to understand and accept their similarities and differences.
H. Shows awareness of the growth and development patterns characteristic of the group taught.
I. Exhibits a sense of humor.
J. Attempts to include all class members in classroom activities.
K. Accepts and/or uses ideas of students.

Strengths:

Concerns:

Recommendations:

II. Teaching and Assessment

A. Organizes time, resources, and materials for effective instruction.
B. Makes a clear and adequate explanation of material presented and procedures followed, and teacher expectations for student involvement.
C. Implements a variety of instructional strategies to motivate students.
D. Encourages class participation through interaction with students and feedback.
E. Recognizes and uses opportunities for impromptu teaching.
F. Utilizes valid testing techniques based on the identified objectives.
G. Exhibits enthusiasm for the subject matter.
H. Demonstrates initiative and responsibility in changing situations.

Strengths:

Concerns:

Recommendations:

III. Classroom Management

A. Maintains classroom discipline.
B. Handles disruptive students effectively.
C. Treats students fairly.
D. Provides an environment conducive to learning.
E. Teacher and students have accessibility to materials and supplies.
F. Physical arrangement of room is attractive and safe as circumstances permit.
G. Teacher makes an effort to include all students through participation, eye contact, and feedback.
H. Students and teacher are courteous and respectful to one another.
I. Gives clear, explicit directions to students.
J. Teacher is careful for the safety of the student.

Strengths:

Concerns:

Recommendations:

IV. Professionalism

A. Maintains a friendly, cooperative, and helpful relationship with other employees.
B. Exhibits leadership by sharing knowledge and techniques with other faculty.
C. Works effectively as a member of an educational team.
D. Demonstrates evidence of professional demeanor, scholarship, and behavior.
E. Effectively expresses self in written and verbal communication using correct grammar and appropriate vocabulary.
F. Demonstrates appropriate behavior and composure in a variety of situations.
G. Uses current educational theories and practices.

Strengths:

Concerns:

Recommendations:

APPENDIX C

ENTRY-YEAR TEACHER OBSERVATION INSTRUMENT

Entry-Year Teacher's Name _____ Date _____
(print)

Subject/Grade _____ Committee Meeting II or III (circle)

School District _____ Superintendent _____

Assessment by:

Teacher Consultant _____ _____
Print Name School

Administrator _____ _____
Print Name Location

Higher Education _____ _____
Print Name University

_____
Signature, Entry-Year Committee Member

Instructions

This instrument is to be completed by each of the Committee members for Committee Meetings II and III as outlined in the Entry-Year Assistance Program Regulations.

There are four (4) categories to which you are requested to respond: (1) Human Relations, (2) Teaching and Assessment, (3) Classroom Management, and (4) Professionalism. Following each category, e.g., Human Relations, there are several descriptive statements indicating some of the characteristics and/or behaviors to be considered in formulating your overall written response to the category.

Please address strengths, concerns, and recommendations under the four categories.

I have discussed the narrative of this assessment with my Entry-Year Assistance Committee.

Comments:

Signature _____ Signature _____
Chairperson Date Entry-Year Teacher Date